

Message Text

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SUBJECT: LIBERALS GIRD FOR CRUCIAL PARTY CONFERENCE

1. SUMMARY: BUOYED BY SPECTACULAR BY-ELECTION VICTORIES AND FAVORABLE OPINION POLLS, THE LIBERAL PARTY ASSEMBLES THIS WEEK FOR ITS MOST CRUCIAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE SINCE THE WAR. ASSURED OF INTENSE MEDIA COVERAGE, IT WILL SEEK TO CONVINCE THE ELECTORATE THAT IT NOW HAS THE PROGRAM AND THE PEOPLE AND THE SUPPORT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES. ITS POLICIES, BASED ON CONCERN FOR THE INDIVIDUAL AND A NON-DOCTRINAIRE APPROACH TO PROBLEMS, HAVE CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL APPEAL. WITH CAREFUL PLANNING AND A BIT OF SHOWMANSHIP, THE LIBERALS COULD

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DO MUCH THIS WEEK TO SUSTAIN THE GROUNDSWELL OF

SUPPORT THEY CURRENTLY ENJOY AND EVENTUALLY RIDE IT TO A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH AT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LIBERAL PARTY WILL HOLD ITS MOST CRITICAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE SINCE THE WAR SEPTEMBER 18-22 IN SOUTHPORT. IT HAS WON FOUR OF THE LAST EIGHT PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS IT HAS CONTESTED, AND SCORED A STEADY RISE IN THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS. (THE OPINION RESEARCH CENTRE'S POLL OF PEOPLE'S VOTING INTENTIONS IN SEPTEMBER SHOWED LIBERALS WITH 29 PERCENT, CONSERVATIVES 30.5 PERCENT, AND LABOR 38 PERCENT.) AS A CONSEQUENCE, THIS WEEK'S DOINGS IN SOUTHPORT WILL ATTRACT INTENSE MEDIA ATTENTION. THIS IN TURN SHOULD GIVE THE PARTY A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO TRY TO CONVINCE THE PUBLIC THAT IT HAS BOTH THE PROGRAM AND THE PEOPLE TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES.

3. TO THIS END THE PARTY LAST WEEK ISSUED A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY STATEMENT SETTING OUT WHERE IT STANDS ON MOST MAJOR ISSUES (FULL TEXT BEING POUCHED TO DEPT). AS SUCH DOCUMENTS GO, THIS ONE IS REASONABLY CLEAR, CONCISE, AND READABLE. MORE IMPORTANTLY, PERHAPS, IT SEEKS TO GIVE SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CONTENT TO MODERN LIBERALISM.

4. ITS OPENING SENTENCE PROCLAIMS THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF LIBERALISM AS A CONCERN FOR THE INDIVIDUAL. IT SAYS THE GREAT ISSUE OF OUR TIMES IS HOW TO COMBINE AND RECONCILE THE WELFARE STATE, DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS, AND INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVE, AND ASSERTS THAT THE LIBERAL PARTY'S GREAT CLAIM IS THAT IT APPROACHES THIS ISSUE "WITH NO DOCTRINAIRE PREJUDICES, NO CLASS INHIBITIONS, AND NO SECTIONAL INTEREST." THE STATEMENT THEN GOES ON TO SUMMARIZE LIBERAL POLICIES FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, HOUSING, LAND, HEALTH SERVICES, AGRICULTURE, TRANSPORT, EDUCATION, IMMIGRATION, GOVERNMENT, AND THE EC. (FOR A DISCUSSION OF LIBERAL POLICY ON THE EC, CF. LONDON'S A-1142, SEPT. 12, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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1973).

5. IN CONCLUSION, THE STATEMENT SPOTLIGHTS FIVE THEMES UNDERLYING LIBERAL POLICIES: REDISTRIBUTION (OF WEALTH), PARTNERSHIP (IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS), DEVOLUTION AND DECENTRALIZATION (OF GOVERNMENT POWER), AND PARTICIPATION (OF ORDINARY MEN AND WOMEN IN ALL DECISIONS AFFECTING THEM). FINALLY, THE STATEMENT PROCLAIMS THE

LIBERALS' ESSENTIAL INTERNATIONALISM.

6. COMMENT: AS THE LIBERALS MOVE NOW TO SPELL OUT WHERE THEY STAND ON THE MAJOR ISSUES OF THE DAY, THEY WILL INEVITABLY FORFEIT SOME OF THE PURELY PROTEST VOTES THEY PICKED UP IN RECENT BY-ELECTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, THEIR CENTRAL THEMES HAVE A SIMPLICITY THAT SHOULD LEND THEMSELVES TO EASY PROJECTION, AND MANY OF THEIR PROPOSALS, ESPECIALLY ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, HAVE POTENTIALLY WIDE APPEAL. WITH CAREFUL PLANNING AND A LITTLE SHOWMANSHIP, THE LIBERALS SHOULD BE ABLE TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS WEEK'S PUBLICITY TO SUSTAIN THE GROUNDSWELL OF SUPPORT THEY CURRENTLY ENJOY AND EVENTUALLY RIDE IT TO A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH AT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION.

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